



## What children want: summary report of the Special Representative’s engagement with children around what needs to be done to end Violence Against Children

Between July and October 2024, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children consulted with approximately 1700 children from over 110 countries<sup>1</sup>, to identify what children expect their governments to do in the next six years to end all forms of violence against children.

Through an online poll, over 800 children responded to the question ‘What are the 3 things your government needs to do to end violence against children in the next 6 years?’. Following the poll, the Special Representative hosted three online interactive dialogues with a total of over 900 children from all regions and presented the consultation results to further discuss their recommendations and suggestions to governments. During these dialogues, the Special Representative engaged with children from different backgrounds and contexts,

including children from vulnerable situations, such as children with disabilities, indigenous children, and children in the



streets.

### **This is what we learned.**

**Legislation, justice systems, law enforcement, government accountability were amongst children’s priorities.**

- Children want tougher laws and stricter penalties for those who commit violence against children.

<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova,

Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Mauritania, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Panamá, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia

- They expect their governments to increase the presence and outreach of law enforcement, to establish special units to handle cases of violence against children, and to better train police force on safeguarding and children’s rights.
- They also want to feel safe when they encounter the justice system and law enforcement.
- They want child-friendly processes, expedited proceedings of cases of violence against children, and to enhance trust with those involved.
- They want their governments to take responsibility of protecting children, to end corruption, and take children’s rights seriously. Within government accountability they expect the decision makers to appoint authorities who will be prepared to address the issue of child protection.
- They also expect authorities to be held accountable for how they implement programs and policies related to violence.

*“Something that perpetuates the situations are the accountability mechanisms that are currently in place. We need stronger accountability mechanisms and stricter penalties for offenders to stop perpetuating the situation of violence against children.” Boy, dialogue Americas & Europe*

**Children want governments to raise awareness in the community. They expect everyone to truly respect children’s rights, and they want more data on the prevalence of different forms of violence.**

- Children want governments to raise awareness on children’s rights, on why violence against children happens and how to prevent it with the family and the community. They know that to stop violence, everyone needs to be educated on its root causes and manifestations.

- They want their governments to conduct more and better research, data collection, and monitoring of cases to better understand the scope of the problem and trends, to guide programs and policies.

*“The government should also consider encouraging schools to have a time to talk about how violence against children is an important and concerning issue for everyone. There could be some speeches in schools to encourage children to report anything that is concerning them, and the Government could work on it”. (Girl from Africa, through written consultation)*

*“Government should launch nationwide campaigns for parents regarding the negative impact of violence against children and promote positive parenting techniques. Expanding social services and child protection programs and the government should focus on increasing access to mental services for both children and parents with free or lower cost counseling services”. (Girl, dialogue Americas & Europe)*



**Children want governments to develop policies and programs to build a child protection system, with the necessary human and financial resources, including the building of capacities in education, health and mental health, justice, and social protection services.**

- Children believe governments can do more in terms of policies and programs to end violence against children: National child protection strategies, programs, and action plans; Policies focusing on prevention of violence against children, child and social development, education, and protection.

- Children expect their governments to prioritize violence prevention, and to increase their investment in child protection, education and awareness raising (with families, children, and the broader community).
- Children expect their governments to properly resource these systems: with both money and people working for them.
- They also want everyone who directly engages with children to be properly trained (educators, justice system professionals, child protection officials, the community at large).

*“The government should empower local officials and social workers to visit remote areas frequently and checking on the wellbeing of children to ensure they are provided services such as education about children’s rights, reporting mechanisms and support systems”. (Girl, dialogue Asia & the Pacific)*

### What children said on preventing violence

- Children expect governments to strengthen the social work system. Governments should make sure services work as protective factors.
- They want to make schools safer, and they consider that governments need to make sure that all children are enrolled in schools, giving particular attention to children in the streets.
- They want further investments in social programs and protection: some mentioned poverty as a driver of violence against children, and the need to financially support families to prevent it.



*“The government should enact and enforce laws that specialize in the prevention of violence against children. The government should work with NGOs and CSOs that focus on violence against children and create awareness campaigns.” Boy, dialogue Middle East & Africa*

*“Have mandatory community social workers who ensure each child in their respective communities is safe and cared for”. Boy from Africa through written consultation*

### What children said on responding to violence

- Children expect governments to fund specialized child protection services, including hotlines, counseling, and emergency shelters that ensure children and enable them to seek help.
- Children expect mental health support to victims of violence against children.

*“The government should ensure that every child, regardless of their location, must be able to easily file a report against their abusers. Mental health services should be accessible and free for children and families victims of violence.” Girl, dialogue Asia & the Pacific*

*“Establishing specialized support centers to provide psychological and social services to children who have been exposed to violence and their families, in addition to Rehabilitation programs to ensure their full recovery and reintegration into society”. Boy from the Middle East through written consultation.*

## What children said on reporting violence

- Access to reporting systems should be child friendly, available and widespread. Many mentioned the need to identify different ways for children to report, including online means and systems children can access in isolated and rural areas.
- Children expect their governments to support and publicize these services widely, and to bring them to scale so they have enough capacity to meet children's protection needs.

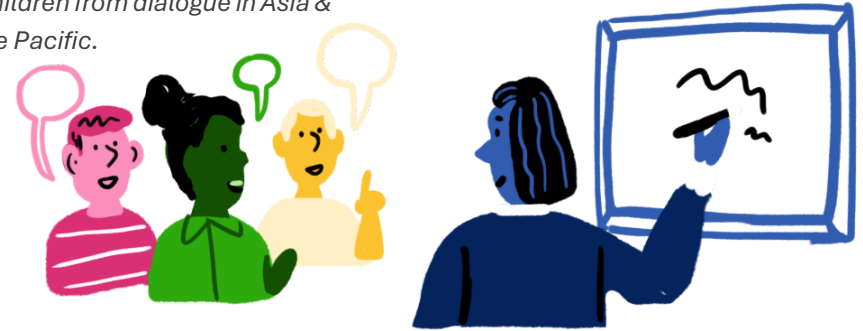
*"Never be afraid to tell what happens to you, if we share, we can find help. Reporting is the first step." Boy, dialogue Americas & Europe*

**Children want to be involved in issues that concern them: they want to have their opinions considered by decision makers. They want to be heard by governments and decisionmakers, and they want safe spaces to do so. They want a role in preventing and responding to violence against children.**

- Children want to be taken seriously. They want to be involved in all the issues mentioned above, they need spaces for participation that are made available for them.
- They want every child's right to speak out respected. They suggest periodic meetings with decision makers, they want their governments to implement and communicate participation platforms, through which children can share their views on diverse topics.
- They want safe spaces where they can speak up and come up with solutions to end VAC. They expect these safe spaces to also help protect them from violence, and to act as convening spaces for them and their peers.

*"Take our words (ideas and opinions) into account - take our presence in important meetings and not leave us to the side - take complaints seriously when the authorities are asked to do something when the aggressor is reported" (Boy from Latin America, written consultation)*

*"When you give us a platform you should try to listen to us and try to implement all of what we say. If it's about children, we would like to be included in the talks." Children from dialogue in Asia & the Pacific.*



**Leaving no child behind: children want governments to be inclusive of children in vulnerable situations**

Children want to ensure that the most vulnerable children are included in policies and programs. They particularly mentioned children with disabilities, children living in poverty and children in rural areas, and children in the streets. Children emphasized the importance of ensuring all of them attend school and are also involved in decision making.

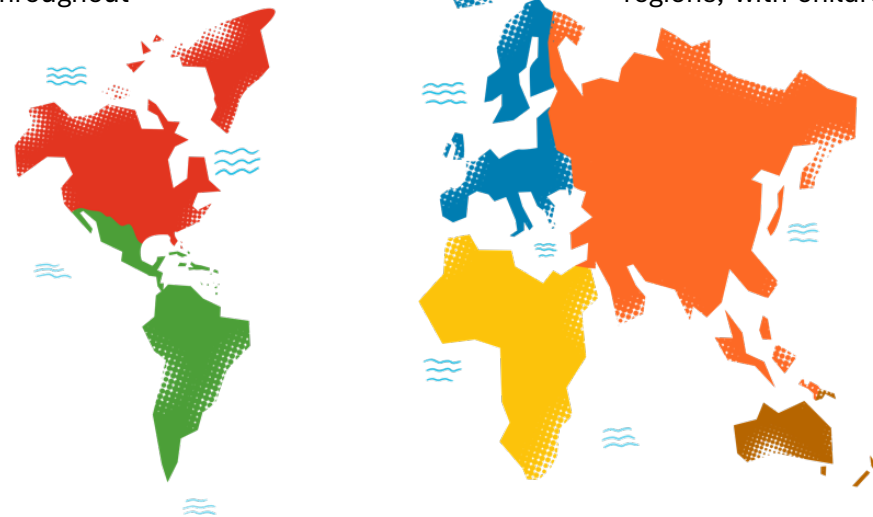
*"People with disabilities represent 10% of the population, so we are talking about 4 million people constantly exposed and vulnerable to different types of violence. The government made adjustments that do not allow them to access basic health services and that have led to the mobilization of this sector. I think that the commitment is great and starts from the bottom, because as young people it is very difficult to propose solutions, but it is very important to promote these*

*spaces of listening and share different knowledge to commit them to the fight for their rights. This is how the change begins.” (Gilr, dialogue Americas & Europe)*

*“I urge the government to intervene in these areas and take a more active role in ensuring that these children are protected. Furthermore, children themselves should have a voice in policies concerning their welfare because we believe to bring fresh perspective and innovative ideas that could enhance the effectiveness of child protection policies.” Boy, dialogue Asia & the Pacific*

### **Children expect governments to end ALL forms of violence against children**

Although children were consulted about violence against children broadly, they are concerned about specific forms of violence that affect them and their communities. Children from all regions emphasized the urgency of addressing the risks that result from children’s online engagements, with particular emphasis on online sexual exploitation and abuse, and cyberbullying. Peer to peer violence was especially noted throughout



recommending diverse solutions to be implemented in schools. Sexual violence and violence in the home was also strongly addressed by children, urging governments to take action. Children also addressed child labour, child trafficking, child marriage, conflicts and wars, poverty and the climate crisis, as concerning issues in their communities.

### **Regional highlights**

In the dialogue between the Special Representative and children from the Americas and Europe, a few issues that were particularly strong were the necessity of addressing different forms of violence online and better regulating the Internet, the recruitment of children into armed forces, the police brutality, the empowerment of girls, and bullying and cyberbullying within the school environment. Children called on decision makers to pay special attention to the needs of children with disabilities.

During the dialogue with children from Asia and the Pacific, children brought to the Special Representative’s attention the importance of reporting systems, the need to provide parents positive parenting tools, the importance of holding more intergenerational dialogues where children get to present their suggestions to decision makers, how substance abuse triggers violence against children, the prevalence of sexual violence, the particular protection needs of children in the streets and of children from indigenous communities who are often isolated and unheard.

Multiple issues were addressed during the dialogue with children from Africa and the middle East, including armed conflict, child marriage, how social norms affect violence against children, child labor, mental health, sexual violence and violence in the home, and psychological violence.

Children also highlighted the need for community-based solutions and local involvement in addressing violence against children. Participants called for empowering local leaders and organizations to take action and provide support tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

*“Take our words (ideas and opinions) into account - take our presence in important meetings and not leave us to the side - take complaints seriously when the authorities are asked to do something” Girl from Latin America through written consultation.*

*“Pay more attention, fast, now”, Boy from Europe through written consultation.*

*“Listening to the needs and wants of children, helping out children in danger and giving them opportunity to a better life”. Girl from Africa, through written consultation.*

*“More empowerment to child representatives and advocates and a safe space to present themselves and be heard and taken seriously should be available, not only in urban areas, but also in rural and sub urban societies”. Boy from Asia through written consultation.*

*“Increase attention to children and the services that help them, and work to provide their needs, ensure their future, and provide them with security and safety”, Girl from the Middle East through written consultation.*

